

‘Quo Vadis’ Practical Theology?¹

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Abstract

In order to ask the question about the future of a discipline, one must realise where one comes from. This article seeks to answer the “quo vadis” question in conversation with some perspectives offered by the sixteenth century Reformer John Calvin. It is argued that Calvin lived in a century that scholars regard as one of the golden periods in which the world of the arts and theatre flourished. Hence Calvin’s age was characterised by a dramatic vision of human existence and such a vision also had an impact on his own theological thinking. Against this backdrop, the article engages the question of the future of Practical Theology by proposing a theo-dramatic approach in which the possibilities that the notion of “re-dramatisation” holds, come to the fore.

Keywords: Practical theology, Theo-drama, John Calvin; Drama

Introduction

In his comprehensive work on nihilism Goosen (2007:17) discusses modernism and post-modernism and concludes that our world is characterised by a “nihilistic de-dramatisation”. Therefore, he speaks of “the loss of the world” caused by the sacrifice of this dramatic relation and states that this sacrifice is, as it were, the condition for nihilism that is so characteristic of our day.

Durand (2002:5) works with the same fundamental conviction when he writes about the “disenchantment of the world...” – a phrase derived from the German philosopher and sociologist, Max Weber. According to Durand, this is a very suggestive phrase: “Man has exchanged the enchanted garden of religiosity for the emptiness and frigidity of modernity.” In other words, we have left the cosy theatre of being human for the cold and often lonely outdoors of rationality.²

In this contribution, I wish to attempt to answer the *Quo vadis* question related to Practical Theology by investigating the possibilities that a “re-dramatisation” of this discipline holds within the field of Theology by latching onto a theo-dramatic approach.³ The reason for the search for a “re-dramatisation” resides in the conviction that Practical Theology is interested in the “intrigues of the ‘plot’ of faith communication”. This is in the

¹ Here, the attempt to pay attention to the *Quo vadis* question relates to the author’s own field of interest and is not representative of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology of the SU.

² Here, an important qualification is at issue. What Goosen and Durand describe applies mainly within the Western religious paradigm. With conviction, Ter Haar (2008:31-48) points out how religion in Africa has not necessarily been affected by the same “disenchantment” or “de-dramatisation”.

³ A theo-dramatic paradigm works with theo-dramatic categories to describe the God-human interaction. According to Balthasar (1988) this approach has the potential to combine a number of theological methods by implementing dramatological categories. Thus, the world and church become the stage upon which God’s story is enacted dramatically. Believers have the responsibility to perform this story with integrity within a community of love and justice.

concrete expression of man's most profound religious convictions where we find the nuances and surprises of the field.⁴

However, initially, I wish to go back five centuries in history and latch onto a few of John Calvin's perspectives. For this, I have three reasons: The first relates to the 2009 commemoration of his birth 500 years ago, thereby to acknowledge the influence of his theology within the Reformed tradition. Secondly, this relates to the potential that "re-dramatisation" of Practical Theology holds in the light of the fact that drama was such an integral part of Calvin's life and work and which also directly influenced his theological views.⁵ The third reason relates to the celebration of 150 years of Stellenbosch University's practising of Theology that developed within the Reformative tradition from its very inception.

A Dramatic Picture of the World

Like all of us, Calvin was a child of his time. He lived in the 16th century – a century that scholars regard as one of the golden periods that flourished in the world of the arts and theatre. The latter then was also the ideal form of art to draw public attention to all the uncertainties of this period of radical changes. Together with these social transformations, the human possibilities for existence grew with new questions concerning identity and a variety of cultural forms of expressing this identity.

A *dramatic vision* of the human existence, based on both the classical texts and traditions, as well as on the Bible, was a characteristic of Calvin's contemporaries. From the Latin orators the Renaissance humanism adopted this vision of the world as a stage upon which all people were actors and who filled it with new meaning. The "theatre metaphor" for human life thus permeated the 16th century's discourse and daily life. It, naturally, also was the century of Shakespeare (Bouwsma 1988:177).

In fact, this "theatrical nature" of the human existence was part of the "oxygen" that Calvin breathed. Therefore, in Part I of his Institution (vi, 2) he described the world as a "glorious theatre" in which we, the spectators, could view the world. In this regard, Durand (2007:156) writes: "For Cicero the universe was a temple. With Plutarch Calvin rather chooses as his ruling metaphor the theatre. The magnificent theatre of heaven and earth, crammed with innumerable miracles, says Calvin, Paul calls the 'wisdom of God'. Contemplating it, we ought in wisdom to have known God. But because we have profited so little by it, he calls us to the faith of Christ."

⁴ Cf. Immink (2003) who is doing a practical-theological study on the life of faith in which he questions the role of the human subject. He researches the way in which faith is in interaction with daily life, but where it is not only about man, but specifically about man's faith in God.

⁵ A new interest in the potential of drama comes from various areas, not only in respect of Practical Theology, but from all disciplines of Theology. Cf. for example: **The New Testament:** Wright, NT 1992. *The New Testament and the people of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; Anderson, BW. 1988. *The unfolding drama of the Bible*. Fourth edition. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press; **Church History:** Quash, B 2005. *Theology and the drama of history: Cambridge studies in Christian doctrine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; **Systematic Theology:** Brown, D 2008. *God and mystery in words: Experience through metaphor and drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Vanhoozer, KJ 2005. *The drama of doctrine: A canonical-linguistic approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox; Von Balthasar, HU 1998. *Theo-drama: Theological dramatic theory: V: The last act*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press. **Practical Theology:** Osmer, RO 2005. *The teaching ministry of congregations*. Louisville, KY: Westminster; Healy, NM 2000. *Church, world and the Christian life: Practical-prophetic Ecclesiology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Childers, J & Schmit, CJ 2008. *Performance in preaching: Bringing the sermon to life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

However, people are not only spectators in this theatre, they are also the actors. This also is why Calvin notes the dramatic events in the lives of those with power and influence. In his commentary on Jeremiah 38:25-36, he relates how the kings, as it were, were placed in the theatre with all the eyes upon them. But, he saw drama also in the lives of common people. From Strasbourg, Calvin watched the developments in Geneva as though a dramatic performance and could not comprehend the "catastrophe" that took place there.

Thus, in 1552, he writes to Melancthon: "I am not ignorant of the position in this theatre to which God has elevated me;" and a few years later, with considerable self-confidence: "Let this (church) be my theatre and content with its approval, though the whole world should hiss me, my courage will never fail. I am far from envying silly and noisy declaimers when they enjoy their small laurel of glory in a dark corner for a little while. What is worthy of applause or odious to the world is not unknown to me" (Bouwsma 1988:178).

Anti-Theatrical Prejudice?

Although Calvin shared in these theatrical perspectives of his day, he was nevertheless uncomfortable with them. The ambiguity of "acting" in the sense of "role-acting" bothered him. According to him, in our daily lives, we often play roles that conceal the true self so as to fulfil the expectations of others, or perhaps to deceive them. To act a role on the stage, means exchanging the authentic self for an unnatural self; thus, as it were, one hides behind a mask and adopts a so-called *persona*. In many of Calvin's letters and commentaries, we find what Barish (1981:102) calls "anti-theatrical prejudice", in which many of the performances on the stage of life are linked to human sinful practices.

In his commentary on Daniel (3:3-7), he resents the misleading of the theatre, while, in his commentary on Jeremiah (9:17-18), he even blames the papacy of "fantastic theatricality". In the same breath, he deals with hypocrisy as, to him, personal integrity was extremely important. For Calvin, honesty was the central virtue, hence also his personal emblem of a hand offering a heart. Furthermore, Calvin was conscious of the fact that the origin of "hypocrisy" resided in the theatre, as hypocrisy was the characteristic of a person who performed fictitious roles in the theatre and during festivals (*Institution* III, xii, 4). As an antidote against this, introspection was very important to him. Thus, in the light of God's law, one must see yourself in a mirror and acknowledge and confess this falseness of your actions.

Yet, according to Bouwsma (1988:178), a paradox was present in Calvin's appeal for introspection as "the way to reclaim the authentic self". For Calvin, "The only way to please God is to be severe in censuring ourselves." But, according to this conclusion, Calvin was already prescribing a role for man: "the role of repentant sinner, to be played self-consciously and self-critically."

Thus, it is clear how problematic the relation between role and reality is in this central aspect of our human existence. Because, instead of the integrity of the self recovering hereby, we find the schism between the observer and the subject being observed, therefore between the audience and the actor. And, neither of the two are capable of acting naturally and spontaneously, as self-conscious and studied behaviour are at issue here.

And, in my view, indeed in this lies an important point of departure for the "re-dramatisation" of Practical Theology. That is, namely, not to deny the theatrical or dramatic nature of life, but rather to question the quality and content of the "performance" as well as the "roles that we play", as there is good and bad theatre, good and bad sermons, good and

bad leaders, good and bad theology, etcetera. This then brings us to the core question that Calvin regarded as the basic plot for participation in the drama of Christian life.

Calvin's Plot?

Initially, it was pointed out that Practical Theology is concerned with the detail and concrete expression of daily faith communication, thus, in the fine nuances of the plot of being human, interpreted by certain characters within the theatre of God's glory (time and context). Now, the question is: How do Calvin's views help in this regard? In other words, what makes Calvin's theology so relevant when answering the question: *Quo vadis* Practical Theology?

According to Smit (2008:2), we find the answer in the Reformatory ecclesiology that was challenged from the outset about how they could call themselves a "church" in the face of the great and powerful institution of salvation – the Roman Catholic Church. "Is this visible institution then not the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church that they confess in the Credo? How, then, can they themselves *also* be a church? What, then, is the church? Where is the church? How does one recognize the church?"

In the Lutheran doctrine of the church, this question is answered in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: The church is where the *Gospel is preached correctly and the sacraments are administered correctly*. According to Smit (2008:2), the Reformed tradition agrees with this, but, as Calvin, in Book III of his *Institution*, begins his discussion of the church's doctrine with this question, he then adds the words *atque audiri*, "and also heard." Thus, the church is recognisable there where the Gospel is preached correctly "and is also heard", and the sacraments are correctly administered. In this way, Calvin wanted to ensure that we remember that the Gospel not only wants to be preached, but also wants to be heard, which means obeyed, lived and "performed".

The latter has drastic implications for Christian life and for the *Quo vadis* question in Practical Theology as, in dramatic language, one finds "and also heard" in the "performance of the plot," in the "faithful performances, enacting Christian tradition."⁶ But, as already indicated, for Calvin it was not only this "plot" of Christian life that is important, but also the *stage* (public life and the community), the *text* (script), the *characters* and their calling.

From this, four focal areas or direction indicators can be noted for the *Quo vadis* question in Practical Theology, which also form the four basic components for a theo-dramatic approach to Practical Theology. These are namely: the *stage* upon which the drama is enacted, the *text* (script), the *plot* (performance) and the *actors* (cast) who play a variety of roles.

The Stage

Introduction

Calvin's programme for the problems of his day stemmed from his conviction that God, as it were, appropriated the world's stage upon the appearance of Jesus Christ as the main character on the stage. By his blood that Jesus offered, God, as it were, sanctified the stage so that we can live under his sovereignty (theocracy). This means that religious reform is not apart from the reformation of secular life. Thus, according to Calvin, God has reformation of the entire world's stage in mind (Bouwsmas 1988:191-192).

⁶ Cf. the significant title of the book by Hart & Guthrie 2007. *Faithful performances: Enacting Christian tradition*.

Thus, Calvin was profoundly concerned about what was enacted upon this stage. "He initiated the diaconate as we know it to relieve social need, he expanded hospitals, established education and a university, helped to fight poverty, helped to transform social circumstances, propagated new economic perspectives, contributed towards renewal of the legal system, and actively contributed towards local and international politics (Smit 2009). Briefly, he wanted to make the city of Geneva a better place in which to live as he was convinced that the whole city and all its people belonged to God.

Analysis of the stage

Several authors believe that our current juncture still grapples with the *spiritual and moral crises* that Calvin addressed 500 years ago.⁷ The nature, extent and causes differ but, in essence, we deal with the same crises.

▪ What is happening?

One of the first challenges for Practical Theology then resides in a fundamental empirical-descriptive analysis of the stage upon which these crises take place.⁸ Therefore, the question that comes to the fore here is: *What is happening? What is going on?* Here, the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation⁹ and the implementation of methodologies from other human sciences, especially social sciences, goes without saying.¹⁰

As regards *research methodology*, except for quantitative and qualitative methods, there is more and more connecting to the critical paradigm and implementation of participatory action research (PAR).¹¹ Already for some time in this regard, an "adapted ethnographic method" for the analysis of congregations has been used.¹² PAR is also being used meaningfully for the analysis of the "social capital" confined in faith communities and the role that these communities play in the further release of these forms of capital.¹³

Latching on to a theo-dramatic paradigm is a method that comes to the fore more and more within qualitative research: the so-called "dramaturgical interviewing" that dramaturgical categories implement to undertake the interviewing process. Here, in conducting the interviews (mainly non-structured), the researcher can alternate the roles of actor, producer and choreographer and thus can deal with the questions from different perspectives. Furthermore, the role of non-verbal communication and the consciousness of the interviewer's own affection is important during the conduct of an interview.¹⁴

⁷ Cf., inter alia, the works of Boesak (2005), Smit (2008), and Cilliers (2007).

⁸ Osmer (2008:4) distinguishes four tasks for Practical Theology, namely the empirical-descriptive, interpretative, normative and strategic tasks.

⁹ At the SU's Faculty of Theology, the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology plays an important role by means of publications and conferences to assist in the analysis of the greater context in terms of globalisation, democracy, capitalism, etc.

¹⁰ In this respect a variety of convictions exist concerning the use of, especially, methods applied in the social sciences. Cf., inter alia, the contributions of Van der Ven (1993).

¹¹ Cf. Babbie & Mouton (2008), Wepener (2005), and Hendriks (2004).

¹² Cf. Pat Ellison Taylor and Frederick Marais's "pushing through the pain". On the other hand, Ellison Taylor latches onto the method of Whitehead & Whitehead (1982).

¹³ Cf. Wepener (2006) and Nell (2009).

¹⁴ In this respect, cf. the work of Berg (2007) who deals with "dramaturgical interviewing" as a separate subdivision in his work on qualitative research.

▪ Why does this happen?

Together with the “what-is-happening” question of the empirical-descriptive analysis, there is a second question, namely: *Why do things happen thus?* This forms part of the so-called *interpretative task* within Practical Theology (Osmer 2008:4). In this respect, a “cultural hermeneutic” is referred to – attempts to interpret and understand what is taking place on the stage within specific contexts.¹⁵ As regards the future of Practical Theology, here lies one of the most important challenges, namely to develop a responsible cultural hermeneutic that must contribute towards the interpretation of the macro-, meso- and microcontexts for individuals, the church and the community.¹⁶

In this respect, the establishment of a department for “community development” made a great contribution towards the practice of Practical Theology and the SU’s Faculty of Theology. A chair for this field was initiated in 1999 with research and publications that emanated.¹⁷ Swart’s (2009) contribution that appeared in the *International Journal of Practical Theology* was the focal article on a “developing field of research in Practical Theology”, and provided an indication of further research’s potential in this connection. In 2008, a collection by De Gruchy, Koopman and Strijbos, *From our side: Emerging perspectives on development and ethics*, appeared and towards which several members of the Faculty of Theology contributed. Within this field lies a great challenge for Practical Theology.

The Text

Introduction

If the world is the “theatre of God’s glory”, then the subsequent question is: How is it viewed and what is observed of God’s action in this theatre? For this, the spectator needs a specific pair of glasses. Calvin uses the familiar image of the Scripture being lenses of a pair of spectacles that enable one to interpret and understand the events in the theatre (*Institution* I, vi, 1). In this respect, Calvin also believed that the Bible is the Word of God, where believers did not need the church’s witness to appreciate its authority, as it contains its own witness that the Holy Spirit strengthens (*sola Scriptura*). Therefore, the Word and Spirit belong together (*Institution* I, vii, 2 & 4).

Calvin’s conversion to studiousness and the authority that he accords to the Bible, proves him to be a diligent researcher of the Scriptures (Van’t Spijker 1990:143). Inter alia, this means that, for Calvin, Scripture was the textbook through which God offers instruction to his children. Therefore, for Calvin, the church was “God’s school” and teaching and preaching were synonymous.

Working with the Text

In reflection upon the role of the text (the *script*, Bible) in the future of Practical Theology, Calvin’s insights can be implemented fruitfully when seeking re-dramatisation, specifically in respect of the “authority” that Calvin accords to the Scriptures.

From a theo-dramatic perspective, Practical Theology finds a meaningful link to the views of Calvin. There is a growing consciousness that, for an imaginative and improvising performance of the plot in the practical being of a congregation, a basic knowledge of the

¹⁵ Cf. Maluleke (2008), Louw (2008), Burger (1999), August (2005), and Vanhoozer (2007).

¹⁶ Cf., in this regard, especially the context analysis by Hendriks (2004), which he found in Ammermann (1999) and adapted and translated into an African context.

¹⁷ Cf. August (2005) in this respect.

what and the why of Scripture is of great importance.¹⁸ Therefore, the communal reading of the Bible within the context of Africa is so important. Various contributions by the colleagues at the Faculty of Theology in the collection of Breytenbach, Thom and Punt (2006), *The New Testament interpreted*, assist in a development of the necessary sensitivity for contextuality in reading the Scriptures (the script).

A further challenge for Practical Theology is a fundamental study of the origin of the various faith communities in the New Testament and early church. The collection of Burger and Nell (2002), *Draers van die waarheid: Nuwe-Testamentiese visies vir die gemeente*, is an attempt in this direction. The recent conference on the theme "*What can we learn from the book of Acts on being a missionary congregation?*" not only opened various interesting perspectives, but also pointed out the value that interdisciplinary communication has for the reading of the Bible.

Within the South African Partnership for Missional Churches, the so-called "dwelling in the Word" has a special place in the programmes for congregational renewal. It is profoundly about the need that *good theology* must inform the study of congregations.¹⁹

The Plot

Introduction

For Calvin, the reformation of the world's stage was directly dependent on the improval and transformation of man, thus of the characters that participate in the drama, therefore ... "the crucial arena for the reformation was the church, for only the church, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, could reform the human heart" (Bouwsma 1988:214).

In this respect it is interesting to note how Calvin chooses the role of the "mother" to describe the plot of the events: "The church, he thought, should rather be a loving mother who bears, nourishes, and preserves her spiritual children. 'There is no other way to enter into life,' he wrote, 'but that his mother should conceive us in her womb, give us birth, feed us at her breast, and lastly keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like angels'" (Bouwsma 1988:214).

Therefore, the unity of the church was so important to Calvin, but this unity did not reside in human attempts (that always were futile), but in a unity in Christ and indeed in a unity in word and deed. It was through the birth of the Child and his entry into the stage of the world that not only this unity, but also the plot gradually began to take shape.

In part IV of his *Institution* it is clear that, when Calvin reflects on the "plot" of the church, he has in mind the "local faith community" (in the sense of, e.g., the church in Geneva). For him, it was a practical and functioning community and therefore, primarily, a community of faith. Within this faith community the practices of faith, starting with the Lord's Supper, is "performed" where believers are committed to each other. In this regard, one could say that there were three aspects that, for Calvin, had to be part of each of these performances, namely, the pure proclamation of the Word, the partaking of the sacraments and the role of ecclesiastical discipline (Van't Spijker 1990:161).

The 'performance' of faith practices

When Christ's entry onto the world's stage is described as the climactic scene, then the so-called *Christopraxis* is the centre of interest from a theo-dramatic paradigm. Here one is

¹⁸ Cf. also the works by Theissen (2007) and Anderson (1988).

¹⁹ In this regard, cf. also the contributions by Keifert, Frederickson, Taylor Ellison and Juel in the volume, *Testing the spirits: How theology informs the study of congregations* (2009).

confronted by the normative task of Practical Theology and the question is: *What should happen?* Christopraxis is about the congregation as a community of disciples who participate in Jesus' mission of salvation.²⁰ The following form part of the congregational praxis as interdependent components of the plot: *marturia* (prophetic), *diakonia* (priestly), *transfiguration* (doxological), *didache* (royal), *koinonia* (open community) or Christ as a friend.

This Christologically founded basis thus forms the normative perspective for the Christopraxis of congregations and could be summarised as follows (Osmer 2005:222-225):

- The *prophetic dimension* lies at the heart of Jesus' messianic and earthly ministry and is linked to the good news (Gospel) of Jesus that the Kingdom has come near. Core practices connected to *marturia*, are preaching, witness and evangelisation.
- The *priestly dimension* focuses on Christ's loving self-sacrifice that saved the world from sin and death and brought it into the right relationship with Him. Core practices related to *diakonia* are the Eucharist, mutual care in the sense of diaconate and social involvement in the form of help to those in need, and justice.
- The *dimension of Christ's transfiguration* points to the beauty of Christ's eschatological resurrection. Core practices related to doxology are the observance of the Sabbath, praising God with music, prayers, songs, dances, poetry, etcetera.
- The *royal dimension* focuses on the eschatological sovereignty of the resurrected and glorified Christ. Core practices related to *didache* are the catechism, moral formation, education and distinction.
- The *open friendship and fellowship* with Christ are about the Godly *perichoresis* in which the Triune God participates. Core practices related to *koinonia* are baptism, spiritual gifts (*charismata*) and hospitality.

Various authors deal with these different subdivisions of the "plot" in the so-called Christopraxis, as the basic ministry of the church.²¹ The importance of the latter resides in its value to investigate the strong, as well as and weak points of a congregation's Christopraxis. Should parts of the "plot" be lacking, or not receive attention, then it is probable that the faith community's vision and mission run the risk of derailment. It results in a "weak performance". Such a normative framework thus is necessary for the healthy development of the plot.

The challenge for Practical Theology resides in a continuous search for the re-orientation of her faith practices. The tendency towards stagnation, where the plot is repeated without reflection, always exists. Heitink (2007) refers to "a church with character" and, through this personification of the church (both as institution and organism) wants to, as it were, point out the dramatic nature of the church's being in the past and present. Just as continuous character development takes place in an individual's life, this is equally necessary for churches and congregations.

Improvisation

What is needed for the church to re-orientate, stay alive and continuously develop the plot, is attention to "improvisation". Wells (2004:51-55) believes that the God-human drama consists of five scenes with the creation as the first, Israel as the second, Jesus as the third, the church as the fourth, and the eschaton as the fifth scene. By making the church part of

²⁰ Osmer (2005:203-236) applies Moltmann's (1975) insights to develop Christopraxis by means of the *munus triplex*, where he further extends the threefold office of prophet, priest and king by two additional dimensions of Christ's mission, namely Christ's transfigured humanity (doxology) and Christ as a friend.

²¹ Cf. Burger (1991, 1999).

the fourth scene Wells suggests that God has already given the church all the gifts to present the plot credibly – gifts that are embodied in the various faith practices, as described above. “Faithfulness is but effectiveness measured against a much longer time-scale: since Act Three has happened and Act Five is to follow, Christians can afford to fail, because they trust in Christ’s victory and in God’s ultimate victory” (2004:55).

In the fourth chapter of Wells’s book, he makes another even more important suggestion by pointing out that the Christian life as drama is not sufficient if it merely concerns the “performance”. He believes that “improvisation” is a better description of discipleship than “performance”, and writes: “Improvisation is the only term that can adequately describe the desire to cherish a tradition without being locked in the past ...” and continues to point out by showing that improvisation, like the Christian life, “requires more than repetition, more even than interpretation – but not so much as origination, or creation de novo” (Wells 2004:65-66). Therefore, for him, this is the most appropriate “mode of existence” for the church in the fourth scene.

The Characters

Introduction

For any drama to make sense, to move through the different scenes from the opening to the conclusion (cf Wells’s suggestion) demands hard work from both the director, the characters and all who are part of the performance. Each participant must know what his/her role comprises and where and when to enter the stage.

For Calvin, this notion of “organisation, leadership and discipline” was of central importance to enable people to co-exist in mutual peace and consensus (*Institution*, Part IV, x, 27). In this respect, according to him, the church in his day also needed leadership that had to be similar to the type of leadership that one finds in the secular world. Therefore, for Calvin, the office of “pastor or minister” was extremely important and, indeed, a person with the necessary talents, wisdom and gifts to play this role with authority (Bouwsma 1988:217).

The Role of Leadership

How does one *change* the practice and what strategies must one implement? Here the role of leadership comes strongly to the fore.

In leadership theories there usually is a distinction between three forms of leadership;²² the first being *task leadership*. This, namely, is the ability that leaders develop to interpret specific roles within organisations, which demand unique skills. With regard to the church and congregation, this is about the role that leaders play, for example, to lead a worship service, proclaim the Word, teach the church members, establish a small group, practise pastoral care, lead meetings and visit the sick. To be equipped and be called to fulfil these different roles, is an important part of leadership and can be regarded as the proverbial “business as usual”. A large part of theological training also involves the preparation of students for the fulfilment of these various roles with the necessary knowledge, disposition and skills within a variety of faith communities.

²² Cf. in this regard, inter alia, the works by: Burns, JM 1978. *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row; Hackman, M & Johnson, C 1996. *Leadership: A communication perspective*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press; Burke, WW 2002. *Organization change: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Quinn, R 2004. *Building the bridge as you walk on it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass; Osmer, R 2008. *Practical Theology: An introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

The second form of leadership is *transactional leadership*, which comprises mutuality, thus reciprocity of others doing something for you when you have done something for them. This is a “trans-act” or reciprocal act of giving and receiving. According to Osmer (2009:176), in the leadership of organisations, this takes place in two basic ways: “(1) meeting the needs of those involved in an organization in return for their contribution to the organization, and (2) making political trade-offs to deal with competing agendas of different coalitions in an organization so it can best accomplish its purpose.”

The third form of leadership is *transformation leadership*. This form of leadership is about “deep change”, as Quinn (2004:200) refers to it, and relates to the leading of an organisation through a process in which the identity, mission and culture are fundamentally being changed. Within a congregational context, this is about changes in, for example, the form of worship, community formation, reaching out to others and hospitality towards new members. It is about the development of a vision of what the congregation can become and the mobilisation of followers who are prepared to commit themselves to this vision.

For Practical Theology, the challenge is to pay attention to all of these three forms of leadership. A good clarification of the various roles is necessary by thoroughly accounting for the changing context.²³ Where these forms of leadership are further linked to the development of “social capital”, it helps to further clarify the responsibilities.²⁴

Re-orientation

Kritzinger (2007:8-11) believes that a total paradigm shift and a total re-orientation of ministry is necessary where the ministry (priesthood) of all believers is important. He challenges the mainstream churches to rethink their models of ministry and theological training within the Africa context. Especially the training of the so-called “lay leaders” within the Southern African context (i.e. training institutions) is urgently needed. According to Kritzinger, even in what way the lay leaders could be “ordained” with the task of the “traditional leaders” to equip the latter for the ministry must be investigated. And, according to him, theological training must be vigilant against intellectual elitism and must also pay more attention to the ministry in rural areas that cannot afford fulltime ministers.

Pat Keifert (2007) and the SAPMC²⁵ have already been working for a considerable time to develop models that help (mainly mainstream) congregations to move away from maintenance to missional transformation. In this respect, leadership *once again* plays a central role and the equipment of regular members to adopt leadership roles is also of core interest.

Conclusion

Bouwsmas (1988:222) concludes his biography on Calvin with the following words: “There is clearly much evidence to support the notion of a severe and authoritarian Calvin. But, as always, there is another side to him, even as a churchman. He could also be flexible, politic,

²³ Cf. the contributions by Burger & Wepener (2004, 2004a, 2004b) on the minister’s office. In this regard, a work from the USA by Willimon (2005) is an interesting contribution on the pastor’s various roles.

²⁴ Cf. my presentation at the Acts conference (May 2009) on leadership in Acts, viewed through the lenses of leadership and social capital.

²⁵ The South African Partnership for Missional Churches has already been operational for 5 years in South Africa. During this time several “clusters” of congregations have been formed with the objective of starting a process of transformation in partnership with other congregations with the special focus on the missional nature of congregations.

accommodating to circumstance, considerate to human weakness and need, and above all practical.”

From this quotation describing Calvin’s “other side” it is clear that he certainly also was a “practical theologian” for whom the *human dignity* of people was important. His own experience of “being a fugitive” not only had a great influence on his “practical-theological” reflections, but played a permanent role in the theological emphasis that he also placed on hospitality towards others.²⁶

With the choice of “human dignity” as one of the focal areas at the SU’s Theological Faculty, the challenge of Practical Theology’s *Quo vadis* question can be summarised as follows: To accept the responsibility by means of study, research and the training of students, faith communities and leaders to assist in so performing the God-human drama by means of improvisation that God’s love will inspire people by means of the “plot of faith practices” in a credible way to take part in this drama and so contribute to unity, reconciliation and justice on the world’s stage as the theatre of God’s glory.²⁷

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²⁶ Cf. the article by Vosloo (2009) in which, in a new way, he applies Calvin’s fugitiveness as a lens through which he examines his life and theology under a searchlight.

²⁷ In a paper that I delivered at the *Societas Homiletica* in Copenhagen, Denmark (June 2008), I attempted to use the Belhar Confession as three moments in the performance of the drama’s plot, cf. Nell (2008).

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